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L.A. County Raises the Bar on Data Protection

Los Angeles County has become the largest municipality in the nation to encrypt all 88,000 of its computers – both laptops and desktops – to protect sensitive and/or confidential data against burglary and cyberattacks.

"This new layer of protection is critical to safeguarding our constituents from data breaches and identity theft," said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, who authored the motion directing the encryption.

Approved by the Board of Supervisors in May 2014, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' motion called for encrypting all of the County's workstation hard drives to safeguard both personally identifiable information and protected health information.

The previous policy had been to encrypt only the County's portable devices.

The motion also took the precaution of requiring all of County's contractors who handle personally identifiable information and protected health information to encrypt both their workstation hard drives and portable devices.

The County's Chief Information Security Officer recently announced the County has successfully encrypted and secured 88,392 workstations using sophisticated software and tools that prevent unauthorized parties from accessing the data within.

County encryption will add security layers to protected Personally Identifiable Information (PII), which includes social security numbers, names, home addresses, phone numbers, credit card numbers and biometric records. PII is any data that can be used to identify, contact or locate a person.

It will also secure Protected Health Information (PHI), which applies to data about a person's physical or mental health condition as recorded by a healthcare provider, health plan, public health authority, employer, life insurer, school and other entities.

Over the years, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas has undertaken several efforts to upgrade and secure the County's Information Technology systems, including requiring regular audits for IT safety; consolidating the county's IT systems into one centralized location, rather than maintaining 49 separate data centers; working to create one centralized electronic health record system; and fostering accountability and transparency by creating a state-of-the-art Open Data Website where residents can access information ranging from restaurant ratings to crime statistics to county expenditures.

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